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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 TASHKENT 001265

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR G/TIP MEGAN HALL AND SCA/RA JESSICA MAZZONE

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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: OFFICIALS DESCRIBE EFFORTS TO
IMPLEMENT TIP LAW

REF: TASHKENT 580

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¶1. (U) Summary: On September 29-30, poloff and a visiting officer from the Department's Office to Combat and Monitor Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP) met with Uzbek officials from the Ministries of Internal and Foreign Affairs, the Office of the General Prosecutor, and the National Women's Committee to discuss the Government of Uzbekistan's efforts to implement its landmark March 2008 law. We also met with the local offices of the International Organization for Migration (IOM)-affiliated NGO "Istiqbolli Avlod," the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to discuss the TIP situation in Uzbekistan. A general theme was that government officials do seem to be working diligently to implement the new law, including productive debates about establishing a state-run shelter for victims, stepped up prosecution efforts, and cooperation with NGOs and international organizations. End summary.

MVD Gears Up

¶2. (U) On September 29 a visiting G/TIP officer and poloff met with Nodir Kurbanov, Senior Officer of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Department on Counter-TIP, and Shavkat Usmanov, Main Inspector of the Ministry of Internal Affairs International Relations Department, to discuss working level efforts to implement Uzbekistan's 2008 TIP law. Kurbanov, a conscientious cop, knows more about TIP than any other law enforcement officer in Uzbekistan and has done a good job organizing an effective nationwide counter-TIP police unit. Kurbanov reported that there are now 120 operational staff in the Ministry of Internal Affairs working solely on TIP throughout Uzbekistan. He said this is projected to increase to between 160-180 officers, which he said should be sufficient manpower. Kurbanov said he personally knows about

100 of these officers and is in regular phone contact with them, and there are concerted efforts to pass the latest information to remote posts (there have been rapid changes this year that have changed the counter-TIP landscape for rank-and-file officers). Nonetheless, Kurbanov stated "the issue of training is a crucial one," and acknowledged that law enforcement officers need a wider exchange of information.

¶3. (U) Kurbanov told us that local versions of the inter-agency commission have now convened in all twelve provinces of the country. While it seems like there are a lot of working groups and committees forming, Kurbanov believes they are necessary in order to raise awareness and get as many actors as possible involved in developing solutions. He praised the recently created national inter-agency commission, noting that "it is not just on paper...it is really working and we have to report to President Karimov by the end of the year." Kurbanov and Usmanov conceded that the TIP database at the Ministry of Internal Affairs is still relatively small, but they are pleased by an ongoing UNODC project to develop and expand it.

Rehabilitation Center

¶4. (U) Kurbanov and Usmanov stated that the establishment of a shelter for TIP victims, which Uzbek authorities are calling a rehabilitation center, "is the main project for us now." They described the proposed government-created shelter as being large enough to accommodate 100 people and will include doctors, psychologists, and social workers. However,

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there are constructive ongoing debates within the Government of Uzbekistan about who will be responsible for administering such a facility. Kurbanov added frankly that, after studying other countries' experiences the Ministry of Internal Affairs concluded it would be best if another entity was responsible.

"Rehabilitation is broader than investigation," he added, "and we are cops." In a separate meeting on September 29 at the OSCE Project Coordination Office, a staff member said OSCE is planning to work with the Uzbeks on developing an appropriate identification and referral mechanism, which should contribute to the effective operation of a shelter, and will also train shelter staff. (Comment: It is encouraging to see an Uzbekistan government ministry taking the time to conduct debates and research case studies before plunging in, and even more encouraging that it is willing to pass up the prospect of a broader mandate and increased territory based on a recognition that is not the best-suited to do the job. This may delay the eventual opening of a shelter, but it will be worth the wait if it is done properly. End comment.)

Shame Factor

¶5. (U) Poloff and G/TIP officer also met on September 29 with two representatives from the quasi-governmental National Women's Committee. They cited tremendous progress in raising awareness to TIP issues among average citizens but said they still are influenced by "our oriental mindset" that means victims -- male and female alike -- still feel a strong sense of shame in Uzbek society. "We need to consider what we can do to make sure women can go home to their villages." The Women's Committee, in conjunction with the Office of the State Prosecutor, produced a new TIP-themed theater performance that debuted on September 26 to help raise awareness.

¶6. (U) Representatives of the Office of the State Prosecutor, with whom we met on September 30, echoed the concerns about the shame factor. They reported that many Uzbeks still don't admit they are victims, citing as an example a recent case in

Moscow in which 58 Uzbek laborers were freed from slave-like conditions. Only 14 of the victims, who came from four different regions of Uzbekistan, would admit they were trafficking victims and cooperate with authorities.

MVD: "Come talk to us"

¶17. (U) The premier anti-TIP NGO in Uzbekistan, the IOM-affiliated Istiqbolli Avlod, told us in a September 30 visit to its USAID-funded shelter for TIP victims that police officials are now unilaterally reaching out for investigation leads. Nodira Karimova, the Director of Istiqbolli Avlod, was recently involved in the repatriation of two young Uzbek women who were trafficked to India for sex exploitation. Kurbanov of the Ministry of Internal Affairs heard about the case and called up Istiqbolli Avlod seeking information so his staff could launch an investigation. Karimova was pleased by the overture, noting it sets a good example and also demonstrates to victims that authorities take their ordeals seriously.

¶18. (U) Such initiative was not limited to this case, as the Office of the General Prosecutor confirmed that 91 criminal cases were initiated just since the national action plan was adopted in July. The accused are presently detained while investigations are underway, according to the prosecutors. The Ministry of Internal Affairs said it was the lead agency on 61 of these cases, with other agencies such as the

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National Security Service responsible for the others. In another positive example of proactive law enforcement, Kurbanov said he networked with a visiting delegation of officers from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) who attended a joint UNODC-OSCE workshop in May (reftel); as a result of informal chats during and since the event criminal cases were initiated. The prosecutors hope the increased focus on punishing offenders will entice more victims to cooperate, which has been a limiting factor in bringing traffickers to justice. They feel a lot of solid legal measures are now in place, and they said "we just need to enforce the measures we have."

NGO: 41 Uzbek Women in Emirati Jails

¶19. (U) Karimova updated us on her continued efforts to assist Uzbek sex trafficking victims and reaffirmed that the UAE is still the number one destination. She has built up good contacts in the UAE as a result of repeated visits there, and she said she is currently aware of 41 Uzbek women (most are likely trafficking victims) languishing in Emirati jails. While she says policies vary in each emirate, Karimova said the authorities generally open criminal cases against foreign trafficking victims for unlawful presence and/or prostitution. Dubai is the most lenient, she said; Sharjah is "so-so"; Abu Dhabi and Ras-al-Khaima "are severe." According to Karimova, in Ras-al-Khaima some Uzbek women have been incarcerated for 3-4 months without charges even being filed against them. They can expect to sit in jail for extended periods as the courts slowly process their cases.

MFA Limitations

¶10. (U) On September 30 we met with Farkhad Khamraev, Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs UN and International Department, which oversees TIP issues. One topic of discussion was the responsiveness of Uzbek consular officers in assisting identified Uzbek trafficking victims abroad, which the NGO reported varies widely among Uzbek embassies. Karimova had informed us that the Uzbek diplomats in the UAE are generally efficient and helpful in issuing repatriation documents to Uzbek citizens, whereas in the above-mentioned India case the NGO had difficulty arranging the prompt return

of the young Uzbek victims with the Uzbek Embassy. Khamraev said he was aware of the India case and was personally involved in eventually working out the repatriation details from Tashkent. He added that, due to the limited size of Uzbek diplomatic missions, the MFA often lacks the personnel at posts to immediately complete repatriation of TIP issues. (Note: Istiqbolli Avlod planned to train MFA consular officers as part of an ongoing INL-funded TIP project, but IOM regional official Mahmoud Naderi told poloff on October 23 that it was not feasible since MFA could not simultaneously pull essential Embassy staff from posts to participate in the training. We will try to identify alternative methods for providing training opportunities for Uzbek consular staff, perhaps including participation in study tours or workshops that take place in or near TIP hotspot posts. End note.)

UNODC Project

¶11. (U) On September 30 we met with the UNODC Regional Office in Central Asia, which updated us about the TIP-related pilot project it is working on at the request of the Government of Uzbekistan. UNODC will procure equipment in November to install a modern database for the Ministry of Internal

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Affairs, which will have real-time connections to branch offices in all provinces up and running by March 2009. In addition, two assessment missions have already been completed focusing on bringing legislation into compliance with international standards. A study tour is also in the works for Uzbek officials, along with two additional roundtables to be held next year.

Comment:

¶12. (U) An overarching theme of our two full days of TIP meetings in the capital with government officials, the main NGO, and international organizations is that there is a lot happening on the ground in Uzbekistan to support the implementation of the 2008 comprehensive TIP law. Six months after its adoption -- and since buttressed by criminal code amendments -- the law appears to have legs as well as teeth. The biggest long-term challenges will come from the cotton fields, as Uzbekistan struggles to shake its dependence on forced labor to harvest its most important cash crop, as well as in rendering quality assistance to legions of trafficked Uzbek victims as they make their way home from abroad.

NORLAND